

TRIBUNE: *MORE PLEASING THAN THE STARS*. PASCHAL I AND THE ROME OF HIS TIME**Carles Mancho**

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Pope Stephen IV died in Rome on 24 January 817. His papacy, which had started with his consecration on 22 June 816, was a brief break after the long and intense papacies of Adrian I (772–795) and Leo III (795–816). At the end of January of the year 817—that is, 1,200 years ago—Paschal I was raised to the pontifical chair. Whereas the pontificates of his predecessors had allowed the administrative and economic reorganization of what has been aptly called the ‘Republic of St. Peter’, and in particular of the city of Rome, the tumultuous seven years of the papacy of Paschal I—he died at some point between February and May of 824—were no doubt the years of the transformation of the city. This transformation needs to be interpreted at least on two respects. On the one hand, the city was remonumentalized, witnessing not only the transformation of some of its most notable buildings, such as St. Peter in the Vatican or Santa Maria Maggiore, but also and above all the construction of new buildings, still extant today: Santa Prassede, on the Esquiline, Santa Maria in Domnica, and Santa Cecilia in Trastevere. So far we have barely questioned the causes of their survival over the centuries, which affects not only the stonework but also decorations. In fact, it is almost an unheard-of case and although the spirit of the Counter-Reformation certainly had a lot to do with it, it nonetheless presents a quite singular situation. These new buildings undoubtedly changed the perception of the city in the eyes of Romans and foreigners alike.

On the other hand, the city also changed conceptually. Much has been written about the great transfer of the 2,300 (two thousand three hundred) bodies of martyrs exhumed in the catacombs and again buried in Santa Prassede. The authors have wondered, among other things, about the origin of said bodies, about the identity of the martyrs, about the first pontiff to break the rule against intramural (*intra mœnia*) burials, and about the state of use and conservation of the catacombs. The change in the concept of city that led to the adoption of this solution has been analysed much less, if at all. Surely the importance of the cult of relics in the Frankish world must have played a decisive role in the decision of Paschal I; and it is also true that eighth-century pontiffs had already undertaken modest transfers, thus creating a precedent. However, the dramatic effect intended by the pontiff who made the decision and the assertion of authority

he demonstrated with this massive transfer are not to be overlooked. On the contrary, this action served both to redefine the figure of the Pope against the Franks—an aim also apparent in many others moments of Paschal's papacy, such as the signature of the Pactum Hludovicianum and the confrontation with Lothair I—and against the Eastern Emperor—the letter addressed to Leo IV on the iconoclastic quarrel is a true statement—as well as to redefine Rome, the ancient imperial city, in front of Constantinople, the already old 'new Rome' founded by Constantine I.

The texts that make up this monographic issue of SVMMA are the result of the conference held in Rome on 17 and 18 November 2016 under the title "*Grata più delle stele*": *S. Prassede e Pasquale I (817-824). Dialogo multidisciplinare intorno alla basilica e il suo papa*. This event served to start shaping some of the ideas that a group of researchers—A. Ballardini, G. Bordi, M. Caperna, A. Verardi, and the author of these lines—gleaned from our visits to the buildings of Paschal I in 2015 and 2016.

As a result of that first meeting, other researchers have joined the team—S. Ammirati, R. Michetti, R. Santangeli Valenzani—thus forming the Scientific Committee of the permanent seminar on the figure of Paschal I and the Rome of his time. This seminar will be held between November 2017 and February 2018, mainly in Rome, and is co-organized by the Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Sapienza-Università di Roma and the Institute for Research on Medieval Cultures (IRCVM) of the University of Barcelona.

Instead of following a more traditional work schedule, through the organization of periodic seminars we aim to discuss at length the importance of this pontiff and the consequences of his actions on the city of Rome and its monuments. After years of research and discussion we believe that this is the best way to propose solid results on a highly complex subject of study.

In the short term, the publication of a volume with the results, as well as other actions now still in an embryonic state, should help us make known and deepen our understanding of the importance of that historical moment and of the pontiff's take on it, which are in turn undoubtedly essential to understand the Early Middle Ages in the city of Rome.

Here, by way of example, you will find the five contributions that were first presented at the foundational conference, the purpose of which is to highlight some of the still unresolved or not yet addressed questions regarding the research on Paschal I; in other words, a starting point for debate.

